



ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

HON. STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW

June 23, 2017

The Honorable
Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street – 4th Floor
Buffalo, New York 14202

RE: Opposition to NFTA Ridesharing Fee

Dear Honorable Members:

Yesterday I was angered and annoyed to learn that the NFTA made a decision to impose a fee on all people using ridesharing services at the airport. I was annoyed for a lot of reasons, but mainly that they did so without first engaging in public discussion with your honorable body. The community we serve has waited too long for ridesharing and the convenience, cost savings, and public safety that come along with it. Downstate lawmakers enjoyed those benefits in their districts while denying them to us strictly for political reasons. In allowing us to have ridesharing services, those same lawmakers loaded the service with new taxes and fees that our constituents and visitors to this area will have to pay.

These new taxes and fees already make upstate New York the most expensive place in the country for ridesharing. But that's not good enough for unelected bureaucrats at the NFTA. They strive to make it even more costly. The same organization that, for decades, denied taxpayers progress on our waterfront announced a decision yesterday to charge every person using a ridesharing service at the airport a fee. They made this decision without the public discussion I think it merits and that is why I am writing to you today.

It is my request that this letter be sent to your Finance and Management Committee to serve as a placeholder on the agenda for a discussion on this very topic. We need to talk openly about the growing cost of government and providing services and how we are paying for it. The answer can't always be "add a fee" or "raise taxes." I want to know why there may be costs associated with implementing ridesharing at the airport. I don't believe those costs are ongoing and significant enough to warrant a fee without end imposed on taxpayers and visitors.

We are currently sitting on a \$100 million fund balance and are in the midst of the capital budget process. If the airport needs funds to implement ridesharing, let them make their case to you on how resources can be used to eliminate this ride sharing fee. There should be an open discussion on what needs to be done now, going forward and how much it will cost. Elected officials armed with information should then make a decision on whether or not this fee should go into effect. But before we stick taxpayers with another fee, we should do our homework and see if it is avoidable.

We already live in one of the highest taxed places in the country. That is a true burden shouldered by taxpayers that we should be focused on relieving. Instead this community is piling on.

With talk of raising the bed tax on the table and now this, government and unelected bureaucrats are going to make Erie County one of the most costly places to visit as well. I will fight to end the misguided philosophy of money grubbing bureaucrats to "tax anything that moves," including ride sharing vehicles. This new fee should have been a discussion, not a decision. I'm annoyed I learned about it through the media, and I hope that together we can roll it back. After all, if we let bureaucrats increase the cost of ridesharing and hurt its chances of success before it even begins, what was the point of fighting to bring it here in the first place?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stefan I. Mychajliw', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

STEFAN I. MYCHAJLIW
Erie County Comptroller

Cc: Kimberly Minkel
NFTA Executive Director

Patrick Kaler
VBN President & CEO